

A Holier Approach to Ministering

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My dear brothers and sisters, young friends of Brigham Young University, how happy my wife, Kathy, and I are to be with you today. I feel your beautiful spirits. Always remember who you are. Some of the very noble spirits of our premortal time together are here today. I am honored to be with you.

The entire Church is speaking about general conference. We participated in a solemn assembly sustaining President Russell M. Nelson as the seventeenth president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Two new apostles were called to the Quorum of the Twelve. Priesthood quorums at the ward level were combined. Home teaching and visiting teaching were retired for “ministering.” And, in the final session, seven temples were announced, including in such exotic places as Russia, India, and Layton, Utah.

I will never forget the sustaining of President Russell M. Nelson. I anticipated that it would be a spiritual experience, but the rush of power and peace that permeated the LDS Conference Center was palpable to me. I pray that it was to you who were not in the Conference Center as well. The closing session, with the announcement of the temples and the singing of “Let Us All Press On,” moved my soul. Do you remember the words?

*We will not retreat, though our numbers may be few
When compared with the opposite host in view;
But an unseen pow’r will aid me and you
In the glorious cause of truth.¹*

There have been some humorous memes following the conference. One I liked had three men in their seventies or eighties dressed in gym clothes, revealing their sunken chests and protruding midsections. The tagline read, “Elders quorum basketball this coming Wednesday.”

Another had a close-up of the ferocious green face of the Incredible Hulk, gritting his teeth, with the tagline “Young President Nelson looking at those liquor bottles.”

And finally, I liked the one emphasizing the powerful announcements in the Sunday afternoon session. The tagline read, “You snooze, you lose.”

I have entitled my talk “A Holier Approach to Ministering.” It comes from the general conference words of President Russell M. Nelson. He said:

Neil L. Andersen, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on April 10, 2018.

*We have made the decision to retire home teaching and visiting teaching as we have known them. Instead, we will implement a newer, holier approach to caring for and ministering to others. We will refer to these efforts simply as “ministering.”*²

Being a student at Brigham Young University means you have chosen to be different from the world. The book entitled *The Narcissism Epidemic* begins with exaggerated examples of our American culture:

*On a reality TV show, a girl planning her sixteenth birthday party wants a major road blocked off so a marching band can precede her grand entrance on a red carpet. A book called My Beautiful Mommy explains plastic surgery to young children whose mothers are going under the knife for the trendy “Mommy Makeover.” It is now possible to hire fake paparazzi to follow you around snapping your photograph when you go out at night—you can even take home a faux celebrity magazine cover featuring the pictures. A popular song declares, with no apparent sarcasm, “I believe that the world should revolve around me!” . . . Babies wear bibs embroidered with “Supermodel” . . . and suck on “Bling” pacifiers while their parents read modernized nursery rhymes from This Little Piggy Went to Prada.*³

As disciples of Christ, we strongly reject the notion that our lives are all about ourselves. Rather, we follow the Savior:

Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

*. . . The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*⁴

We treasure His words:

*“Love one another; as I have loved you.”*⁵

*“Feed my lambs. . . Feed my sheep.”*⁶

*“When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”*⁷

*“Succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.”*⁸

Here is an example of the kind of Christlike ministering that happens here on the BYU campus. One of you recently wrote:

I was going through a really rough time. One day I was really struggling and on the verge of tears. I pleaded and prayed silently for strength to continue. In that exact moment, my roommate sent me a text expressing her love for me. She shared a scripture and bore a testimony. It brought me so much strength and comfort and hope in that moment of despair.

Let me share a few thoughts that hopefully will strengthen the already outstanding way that you now minister to one another.

My first point is this: Remember the first commandment before you exercise the second.

One came to the Savior and asked Him:

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*⁹

Your ability to bring a holier approach to loving your neighbor, to caring for and ministering to others, will rest upon how strongly you keep the first commandment.

Another Kind of Ministering

There is a unique and supernal gift of ministering that can come from someone who loves God with all his or her heart; who is settled, grounded, steadfast, and immovable in his or her faith¹⁰ in Jesus Christ and in the restored gospel; and who keeps the commandments with exactness.

Let me quickly give you some context that you already know. Across the world, your generation is slipping in its faith and especially in its belief in a specific religion. When I graduated from BYU in

1975, the number of young adults (ages eighteen to twenty-four) with an affiliation with a religion was near 90 percent. It is now at 66 percent. A full third of young adults do not affiliate with any organized religion.¹¹

In 2001 the religious scholar Robert C. Fuller wrote a book called *Spiritual, but Not Religious*.¹² This may have been true twenty years ago, but it is less true today. Young adults in the United States today pray with less frequency, believe less in God, believe less in the Bible, and believe less in commandments.¹³

On this wonderful campus, it is different. Faith flourishes, and we, here this morning, are believers. But it is naïve to believe that the trends of the world are not able to influence the very elect.

Caring for others, physically and emotionally, requires an unselfish and sensitive heart. It is an important part of the gospel. This caring is done in and out of the Church by good people, believers and nonbelievers. There are many wonderful, kind people all over the world, and we can learn from them.

However, unique to a converted member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is another kind of ministering. At BYU you have the opportunities, as disciples of the Savior, to minister in a way that helps keep a friend's faith from faltering, that reminds a roommate in a kind way that reading the Book of Mormon every day really does bring miracles and that the standards of the Church are not just a set of rules but keep us closer to God and bring us happiness.

A person with a good heart can help someone fix a tire, take a roommate to the doctor, have lunch with someone who is sad, or smile and say hello to brighten a day.

But a follower of the first commandment will naturally add to these important acts of service, encouraging the person who is doing well in keeping the commandments and sharing wise counsel to strengthen the faith of someone who is slipping or who needs help in moving back onto the path he once traveled.

At BYU you are surrounded by believers who are in various stages of belief and testimony. I

challenge you to strengthen your efforts to spiritually minister to one another. To minister spiritually can begin with baking cookies or playing a basketball game, but eventually this holier way of ministering requires opening your heart and your faith, taking courage in encouraging the positive growth you are seeing in a friend, or expressing concerns about things you see and feel are not consistent with discipleship.

Let us not be self-righteous, but let us be spiritually courageous in ministering in a holier way, specifically by strengthening the faith of others.

To stir your thinking, consider these possible situations:

- You notice that a roommate spends an inordinate amount of time playing games on an iPhone but rarely engages in conversations relating to gospel topics.
- You have a sense that a friend may have a problem with pornography.
- You are in a conversation with friends and notice that the language being used is edgy and inappropriate.
- You smell alcohol or marijuana in a friend's car.
- You see prescription drugs that you know are not being used properly.
- Your friends are spending enormous time taking and posting pictures of themselves that move to the edge of immodesty.
- You notice that someone who once seemed to love to talk about the Book of Mormon now never mentions it.
- You notice that a friend who once seemed to love to go to the temple now is not going.
- You notice a friend who once spoke with faith about the prophet's counsel now speaks critically.
- You have a returned missionary roommate who has become very casual in wearing clothing that reflects temple covenants.
- You notice a friend who finds reasons to go places on Sunday other than your ward.
- You have a sense that a friend has started to be dishonest in small things.

- You have a classmate who began the semester very engaged in your religion class but who now seems disinterested and disengaged.
- You know someone who had a light in his or her eyes after returning from a mission, but now that light seems to have faded.
- You have a friend who jokes about sacred things.
- You have a friend who came to BYU with the expectation of finding an eternal companion and hasn't. The discouragement with dating has moved to "God doesn't love me."
- You see a friend's faith being affected by compromised worthiness and his need to repent.

Can you envision these situations or others like them? Have specific names come into your mind?

The Apostle Paul said, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."¹⁴

The greatest need here at Brigham Young University, as anywhere else in the world, is to have more faith in our Heavenly Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and to have a greater willingness to follow His commandments.

Ministering to the One

Following the pattern of the Savior, most of our ministering will be from one person to another. To the Samaritan woman at the well, the Savior said:

Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. . . .

The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not. . . .

[Then she said,] I know that [the] Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

[Then] Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.¹⁵

Even in declaring His own divinity, Jesus ministered to the one.

Here is an example from a BYU student:

I got to know Tyler¹⁶ after he moved into the apartment down the hall from mine. I helped him move some of his stuff into the apartment, and as we talked we found that we liked the same kind of music. A few days later my roommate and I started chatting with him. Without us guiding the conversation to Church-related things, Tyler told us that he wanted to be straight with us about his relationship with the Church. He said he had many doubts that he was working through. What ensued was a deep conversation about truth and how one finds truth in the world today. My roommate and I testified of the Book of Mormon and about revelation. Tyler shared that his parents didn't know about his doubts and thanked us for listening and being so understanding. We prayed together before we left.

That is a good illustration of how to begin a longer process.

Ministering in the Lord's Way

Unlike changing a flat tire, just one experience rarely fixes a spiritual problem. It takes time, conversations, and encouraging experiences that will help rebuild faith. It comes more like the dew from heaven than a one-time blast from a firehose. You have to minister again and again as you help someone turn back to God and again rely on the Savior and His Atonement.

To minister in the Lord's way, we need the help of the Holy Ghost. President Nelson spoke powerfully on this subject in general conference: "In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost."¹⁷

President Nelson added, "I urge you to stretch beyond your current spiritual ability to receive personal revelation."¹⁸ He counseled us to pray, to listen, to write down our thoughts, and to take action.

Can we apply this to ministering in a holier way? Let us pray, listen, record our thoughts, and take action regarding those to whom we can minister.

Pray for opportunities to build faith in others. Not all of those you help will be people you know. When Jesus ministered to the widow of Nain,¹⁹ He was on His way to somewhere else. However, while on His way, Christ saw her and had compassion for her, and it changed her life.

Pray that these opportunities will come to you, listen, write down your thoughts, and then be ready to take action as people are put in your way.

I have always been moved by the Psalmist's cry: "I looked on my right hand . . . but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man [or woman] cared for my soul."²⁰ There may be some here who feel that way. Let's help them.

To have the help of the Holy Ghost, we have to prepare our minds and hearts. In your generation, you need discipline and restraint in how you use your technological devices. Adam Alter, in his book called *Irresistible*, spoke about the addictive behavior of technology and social media. He quoted Greg Hochmuth, one of Instagram's founding engineers, who commented, "There's always another hashtag to click on. Then it takes on its own life, like an organism, and people can become obsessive."²¹ Mr. Alter went on to say:

Instagram, like so many other social media platforms, is bottomless. Facebook has an endless feed; Netflix automatically moves on to the next episode in a series; Tinder encourages users to keep swiping in search of a better option. . . . According to Tristan Harris, a "design ethicist," the problem isn't that people lack willpower; it's that "there are a thousand people on the other side of the screen whose job it is to break down the self-regulation you have."²²

Mr. Alter continued:

A like on Facebook and Instagram strikes one of [the right neurological] notes, as does the reward of completing a World of Warcraft mission, or seeing one of your tweets shared by hundreds of Twitter users. The people who create and refine tech, games, and interactive experiences are very good at what they do. They run thousands of tests with millions of users to

learn which tweaks work and which ones don't—which background colors, fonts, and audio tones maximize engagement and minimize frustration. As an experience evolves, it becomes an irresistible, weaponized version of the experience it once was. In 2004, Facebook was fun; [today,] it's addictive.²³

For the Spirit to dwell in us, we have to have time and space. Learn to put your smartphones down. Insert time when your technology is intentionally not accessible.

In last week's general conference, President M. Russell Ballard said:

Too many allow themselves to almost live online with their smart devices—screens illuminating their faces day and night and earbuds in their ears blocking out the still, small voice of the Spirit. If we do not find time to unplug, we may miss opportunities to hear the voice of Him who said, "Be still, and know that I am God" [Psalm 46:10]. Now, there is nothing wrong with taking advantage of the advances in the technologies inspired by the Lord, but we must be wise in their use.²⁴

Now, let me say a word to the wonderful faculty about their opportunity to minister. No one comes to the faculty of Brigham Young University without desiring to lift both the intellect and the spirit. How thankful we are for this great faculty of faith that reaches out and shares with students not only the important learning of their discipline but the principles and experiences that have built their faith in the Savior. Brothers and sisters of the faculty, please be very vigilant with this vital contribution that you make.

Perhaps this thought could be helpful to someone on the faculty: As General Authorities, we often speak to large stake conferences of several hundred people. We come to these meetings without prepared text, praying for the inspiration of the Lord. That inspiration rarely comes to me as I look over the large congregation; rather, it comes to me as I look into the individual faces of the members. As I speak to the one, the message is magnified for all.

I encourage you professors to pray for opportunities to share your faith and spiritual experiences. I know you do. The words will come as you look into individual faces. As you speak to the individual student, all will be lifted.

Thank you, dear brothers and sisters of the faculty, for your willingness to minister to these very elect sons and daughters of God.

Strengthening Each Other

During my undergraduate days at BYU, other than my wife, Kathy, whose eternal influence is impossible to measure, there were two roommates—one before my mission and one after—who greatly shaped my spiritual foundation. One was Reid Robison, now a professor here in organizational behavior. I met him on my mission, and we were roommates afterward. Reid’s exactness in following the commandments, his love for the prophet, and his unwavering testimony of the Savior strengthened me and all those around him. And he has continued to be an example to me for the past forty-five years.

The other roommate I mention is Terrel Bird, who now lives in St. George, Utah. I first met Terrel as we attended high school together in Pocatello, Idaho. Although we played basketball together, our friendship came as I observed his spiritual maturity. He would openly share spiritual insights he was having and principles of life he was reading about and learning. I was surprised to hear these things from a seventeen-year-old. We decided to room together at BYU.

In those days we didn’t have computers; we had typewriters. Terrel would take scriptures that were meaningful to him and quotations that instilled character, type them, and then store them in a small box so he could draw from them frequently. It was not uncommon for him to have more than a thousand scriptures and quotations, many of which he would memorize. Although I was working—cleaning the library every morning from four to seven—and carrying a full load of classes, in watching Terrel, I began to build my own file box.

Here is one of the quotes I still remember from almost fifty years ago:

*Mind is the Master power that moulds and makes,
And Man is Mind, and evermore he takes
The tool of Thought, and, shaping what he wills,
Brings forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills:—
He thinks in secret, and it comes to pass:
Environment is but his looking-glass.²⁵*

I also remember, of course, powerful scriptures like this one:

*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:
And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.²⁶*

Terrel helped me put into my mind as a freshman at BYU words of scripture and words of wisdom that have influenced me all of my life. I thank Reid Robison and Terrel Bird for caring about me spiritually at a time when it made a difference.

Here is some poetry of my neighbor, Thomas L. Kay:

*Thank God for all who give relief
for those who really care
Who put their arms around the weak
and plead for them in prayer*

*Thank God for those who hear the heart
and listen to the words
Who know a look or gentle touch
mean more than all the world*

*Thank God for those who lift the hands
and strengthen feeble knees
Who go about restoring souls
in quiet ministry.²⁷*

My dear friends and fellow disciples here at BYU, I give you my sure witness that I know the Savior lives. He is resurrected. He guides this holy work. President Russell M. Nelson is His anointed

prophet upon the earth. Our time upon the earth is eternally important.

I promise you that as you love God with all your heart, pray to be an instrument in His hands, minister to individuals, build your capacity to receive revelation, and trust in the influence of the Holy Ghost, the Lord will put His special sons and daughters in your path, and you will become their ministering angels, blessing their lives eternally. You will minister in a holier way.

I witness of the Savior and of your eternal worth to Him and that He will come again and will embrace us as His sons and daughters, as His disciples. I so declare in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. "Let Us All Press On," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 243.
2. Russell M. Nelson, "Ministering," *Ensign*, May 2018.
3. Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 1.
4. Matthew 20:26–28.
5. John 13:34; see also John 15:12.
6. John 21:15, 16.
7. Luke 22:32.
8. D&C 81:5.
9. Matthew 22:36–39.
10. See Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:23; 1 Nephi 2:10; Mosiah 5:15; Alma 1:25; 3 Nephi 6:14.
11. See Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 121, figure 5.1.
12. See Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
13. See Twenge, chapter 5, "Irreligious: Losing My Religion (and Spirituality)," *iGen*, 119–42.
14. Ephesians 6:12.
15. John 4:13–15, 25–26.
16. The name has been changed.
17. Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign*, May 2018.
18. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church."
19. See Luke 7:11–15.
20. Psalm 142:4.
21. Greg Hochmuth, quoted in Natasha Singer, "Can't Put Down Your Device? That's by Design," *Personal Technology*, *New York Times*, 5 December 2015, nytimes.com/2015/12/06/technology/personaltech/cant-put-down-your-device-thats-by-design.html; quoted in Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 3.
22. Alter, *Irresistible*, 3; see Tristan Harris, quoted in Singer, "Can't Put Down Your Device?"
23. Alter, *Irresistible*, 5.
24. M. Russell Ballard, "Precious Gifts from God," *Ensign*, May 2018.
25. James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (1902), frontispiece.
26. John 11:25–26.
27. Thomas L. Kay, "Saints," 17 February 1996, in *The Road I've Taken* (Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu Press, 2016), 16; see also "Saints," words by Thomas L. Kay and music by Rachel Bastian, *New Era*, September 1999.